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ABSTRACT

Students of human development increasingly recognize that chronological age is not necessarily the best and certainly not the only measure of an individual's "age." The present study is an examination of the attitudinal correlates of subjective age identification among the younger adults in a nationally representative sample of the United States in 1972. Respondents 18-24 and 25-35 years of age were categorized as those having a subjective young identification, and those not expressing an age identification. A number of multi-item attitude scales in such areas as political alienation, fiscal optimism, and political protest were included; analysis focused on impact which subjective age identification made on the attitudes and on the organization of those attitudes. Three general conclusions were documented: (1) A substantial proportion of the youngest age group exhibits a subjective young age identification, with the proportion being about half that in the 25-35 age group. (2) Subjective age identification does make a difference in both attitude-holding and attitudinal organization. Depending on the particular attitude examined, the subjectively young/and those with no subjective age identification exhibited different attitudinal patterns. (3) The influence of subjective age on sociopolitical attitudes is independent of variations in the socioeconomic status of the respondents. (Author)

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THE ATTITUDINAL MEANING OF SUBJECTIVE AGE IDENTIFICATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS*

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INTRODUCTION

Students of human development increasingly recognize that chronological age is not necessarily the best and certainly not the only measure of an individual's "age". Every individual objectively has "an age" in chronological terms, representing one dimension of his or her location in the social structure. But the selective perception or misperception of that age in terms of social interaction, as well as the personal salience of age, are to a large extent socially-determined (Bengtson, 1973). This may well be the more important dimension of life-course location as far as a variety of psychological, sociological, and political characteristics are concerned. The phenomenon of an individual's subjective age identification -- its presence or absence, its strength and intensity, its centrality and salience -- serves as a critical intervening variable between chronological age and human attitudes and behavior.

Several traditions of social theory, classical and contemporary, suggest the importance of subjective age identification in understanding the relationship of age, age groups, human development, and social change (see Cutler, 1975; Bengtson and Cutler, 1976; Bengtson, Kasschau, and Ragan, 1976). The purpose of the present paper is to explore the role which subjective age identification plays in the organization of social and political attitudes among the young within the American adult population. Specifically, our purpose is to identify those individuals within a particular chronological

age group who may be characterized as expressing a subjective age identification and those who do not, and to explore the attitudinal correlates of such age categorization.

Of course, individuals of any chronological age group may develop a subjective notion of age which is of greater importance to their cognitive structure, self-concept, and general orientation toward self and others, than is their actual chronological age. The fact that the present study investigates variation in subjective age among young adults is certainly not to suggest that the inquiry should be limited to the younger end of the life cycle. Indeed, the project of which the present paper is a part has sought to investigate the role of subjective age identification in the attitudes and orientations of older persons as well (Cutler, 1974; Cutler, 1975). Since subjective age identification among the young could emerge differently and have different attitudinal consequences depending upon how "young" is operationally defined in chronological terms, we have attempted to be comparative by presenting the analysis in parallel fashion for two age groups: 18-24 years old and 25-35 years old. While the primary focus of this paper is within each of these two chronological age groups -- in examination of the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young sub-groups within each -- it may be useful from time to time to note the differences, if any, between the two chronological age cohorts of young adults.

Three hypotheses will be tested. The first concerns the degree to which the different attitudinal items are in fact endorsed or rejected by respondents in each of the chronological age versus subjective age sub-groups. It is hypothesized that the subjectively young within each chronological age group are more optimistic, less alienated, and more oriented toward sociopolitical involvement than are the non-subjectively young.

The second hypothesis concerns the way in which the separate items which comprise each attitudinal cluster are organized; that is, do the items represent a more or less unified whole for these age groups, or are they relatively unrelated to one another? Of course, this represents the classical question of index or scale construction. The focus, however, is not in creating an attitude scale but in determining if sub-groups identified in terms of subjective age differ in the degree to which their attitudes represent relatively integrated structures. Specifically, it is hypothesized that the subjectively young have more strongly integrated attitude structures than the non-subjectively young.

The third hypothesis concerns the possibility suggested in some prior research that subjective age identification evolves or emerges only within specifiable socioeconomic groups, i.e., that only within such groups is there the need or, conversely, the resources to employ age as a dimension of social organization. This hypothesis suggests that subjective age identification is simply an outgrowth of specifiable socioeconomic factors and, consequently, that variation in social and political attitudes accounted for by subjective age is really variance more accurately explained by the socioeconomic factors. While there is also evidence which indicates that subjective age identification or age consciousness is indeed an independent dimension of affective and cognitive organization, the hypothesis is here phrased in the more limiting version; i.e., it is hypothesized that attitudinal differences between the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young are a function of socioeconomic differences.

I. BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

The conceptual status of subjective age identification, as it is related to chronological age -- and as it may be an antecedent of social and political attitudes -- has been described by Riley (1971) who draws an analogy between social class and age. In most societies it can be said that, objectively speaking, everyone has a social class or position in the socioeconomic structure. Yet (as Marx noted) while everyone has a social class, not everyone is aware or conscious of that position. And even among those who are conscious of their class, not all will find class to be a salient dimension along which their attitudes and behavior are organized. The situation, Riley argues, is the same for the case of age and age consciousness. In objective terms, everyone has a chronological age, but everyone does not identify themselves or possess a self-image in terms of their age. And, like social class, even among those who do subjectively identify with their age group, age may not be a uniformly important dimension along which the individual's social and political orientations are ordered.

What has been described here as being characteristic of the individual may also be true of whole societies. While every society has an age structure, not every society can be characterized as having an age structure that is a salient dimension of political or social conflict. In short, both for individuals and for societies, age may or may not be a central aspect of social conflict; the magnitude of the importance of age (or class) consciousness may vary historically from time to time, and may vary substantively from issue to issue (or attitude to attitude).

A more classical treatment of the implications of age consciousness for social and political attitudes may be found in Karl Mannheim's (1952 [1928])

conceptualization of the "problem of generations": the periodic emergence of distinctive political movements or social styles, often crystallizing in specific age groups, which occur during some historical periods and not in others, and which serve as benchmarks in the later delineation of "ages" or "eras".

Perhaps Mannheim's most influential contribution to modern social analysis is his translation of classical idealistic philosophy into sociology: reality, as man experiences it, is socially defined. Thus the basis for human behavior is an awareness or consciousness of positions and expectations. For Mannheim the age group as "generation" represented the unique pattern of interaction between a demographic birth cohort and the particular configuration of socio-political events which occurred during the cohort's socialization. Mannheim went beyond this "objective" characterization of generations, however, to include the crucial "subjective" element which created, of only some demographic birth cohorts, a "true generation": historical consciousness -- a term which he defined as a sense of group identity and purpose emanating from an awareness of participation in history.

Thus, in Mannheim's conceptualization, the locus of social change is found in the age self-conscious sub-group within a demographic birth cohort which recognizes its unique or special place in and interaction with history. This age consciousness in an historical context becomes possible, according to Mannheim, since each successive youth cohort has "fresh contact" with existing social institutions and ideologies. In turn, the new perspectives precipitated by the fresh contact result in inevitable questioning of the established social order, and can lead -- under such circumstances as politically traumatic events -- to the formation of the "generation unit" which is the active, dynamic, self-conscious force in the forging of social movements

and, occasionally, revolutions. Thus, not all members of a youth cohort are historically or generationally self-conscious of a special role in society and social change; consequently, it becomes particularly important to consider the social and political attitudinal differences which may distinguish between the age conscious and the non-age conscious members of identifiable cohorts of younger persons.

Age consciousness or subjective age identification has not only been discussed in the context of youth. Social gerontologists have attempted to employ the concept of age identification in differentiating groups within the population of the elderly. Following the Mannheimian conceptualizations described above, some writers have demonstrated the possibility of "generation units" emerging among contemporary or future populations of older persons as a consequence of the unique intersection of social, political, and economic "events" and the characteristics of population groups which will be old in particular decades (Laufer and Bengtson, 1974; Cutler and Schmidhauser, 1975; Bengtson and Cutler, 1976).

A more typical application of the construct of subjective age identification in gerontological studies, however, has concerned subjective age as a correlate (whether antecedent or consequent) of certain socio-emotional states of the older individual. That is, researchers concerned with the "successful" adjustment of old people to their age and age-related changes and statuses have found that the psychological acceptance or denial of old age is a general indicator of the individual's mental health. Thus in his review of several studies of age identification, Peters (1971, p. 72) notes that adjustment is more related to subjective age than it is to chronological age; those older persons who maintain a subjectively young identification are better adjusted, have higher morale, react more favorably to role changes, and are better able to withstand stress (see also Blau, 1973).

While the interest of the present research is not in "adjustment", the perspective summarized above does at least suggest that those who do identify with their age group may be different from those who do not so identify on some basic attitudinal orientations. Indeed, the dependent variables to be analyzed below to some extent may be conceived of as socio-political counterparts to the adjustment concerns of gerontological research.

Yet, it is also interesting to note that in gerontological studies one of the strongest correlates of subjective age identification found by Peters was social structural rather than psychological in nature: social class membership. Indeed, in studies of the older population some analysts have even argued that subjective age identification itself is but a reflection of social class or other indicators of "disadvantaged status"; i.e., that it is only the disadvantaged elderly who are likely to identify themselves as old, since the more affluent elderly are in a better position to maintain their previous life-cycle identifications (Binstock, 1972). Similarly, at the younger end of the life cycle some studies of youth and socio-political protest have indicated that it is mainly among the affluent college-attending youth that generational consciousness and social activism are likely to occur (e.g., Flacks, 1967). The relevance of this line or argument for the present study is simply that we must consider the possibility that -- for whatever causal reason -- the phenomenon of subjective age identification is simply a deterministic function of social class variables. If, indeed, subjective age identification is a highly selective outgrowth of specifiable social locations, then it would be the indicators of social location which best explain the variance in attitudes and behavior; i.e., this line of argument suggests that the correlation between subjective age and key dependent variables is spurious. Thus in the present research we shall test to see if the

attitudinal patterns characteristic of the subjectively young among the chronologically young disappear when controls for social class are instituted.

II. DATA BASE AND ANALYTIC PROCEDURES

The present study is based on a national probability sample of the adult American population, representing 2,705 personal interviews. The survey was undertaken by the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies in conjunction with the 1972 presidential election. The survey is part of a long-term program of national congressional and presidential election-year attitude surveys which began in 1948. Thus, the data represent the highest quality and prior experience in terms of sample design, questionnaire construction, interviewing, and data preparation.

As one of its regular election studies, the 1972 sample included a wide variety of social, economic, and political questions. Unique to this survey, however, was the inclusion of a sequence of subjective identification items among which were included questions pertaining to age identification. Thus, it is the conjunction of chronological age, an index of subjective age identification, and general socio-political items that provides the basis for this analysis.*

The 1972 survey included a series of dichotomous "closeness" items in which the respondent was asked "Do you feel close to _____?" -- yes or no.

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*The data were acquired through the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research. The items on age identification were designed by Professor Gerald Gurin, Department of Psychology, University of Michigan. Sincere gratitude is expressed to Professor Gurin for releasing the age identification for this research project even though his own research is not yet completed. The particular measure of subjective age identification constructed from the available items, however, is the present study's responsibility.

In the interview the question was asked for sixteen different groups (e.g., businessmen, whites, blacks, farmers, etc.) including "young people" and "old people." At the end of the series of dichotomous items a summary question was asked concerning the one group toward which the respondent felt closest. The construction of our measure of subjective age identification is based on a combination of the two dichotomous ("feel close") age items and the one summary ("closest") item.

As the respondent could answer either yes or no to both of the dichotomous items (feel close to old, feel close to young), the following typology becomes possible: (a) feel close to both old and young -- 22.5% of the total sample; (b) feel close to old but not to young -- 18.2%; (c) feel close to young but not to old -- 21.1%; (d) feel close to neither age group -- 38.2%. It was initially decided to use the middle two combinations as the operational definition of age identification since the fourth group identifies with neither young or old, and the first group feels close to both young and old. The second step in the identification of the subjectively old and the subjectively young was to identify those in the first group ("feel close to both") who chose either "old" or "young" from among the sixteen identifications presented in the summary question -- "which one group do you feel closest to?"

Thus, our operational definition of a subjective young-age identification represents the individual who feels close to young people but not to old, or who feels close to both but feels closest to young people. The analysis will be concerned with those in the 18-24 and 25-35 age groups who expressed a young age identification. Deleted from the analysis are those few chronologically younger persons who subjectively identified as old. Finally, although we are clearly using only a portion of the data available,

consideration of all age groups and all the age identification data indicates that our measure of subjective age identification is imperfectly but substantially correlated with chronological age, as demonstrated in Table 1.

-- Table 1 about here --

The main focus of the analysis is to compare the subjectively young with the non-subjectively young in terms of their position on a number of attitudinal measures, including the organization or structure of those attitudes. To accomplish this we have chosen four clusters of quite general socio-political orientations representing political alienation, fiscal optimism, personal life control, and protest politics. Each of the clusters contains from three to five items. Each cluster is briefly described here in terms of its general content, with the separate items represented by the symbolic name which is used later in the analysis.

A. A "Political Alienation" cluster represents the individual's estrangement from government and the political process; the separate items express the view that the individual has little or no say in how government is run (NOSAY), that government is too complex for the ordinary citizen to understand (COMPLEX), that politicians really don't care about what the people really want (NOCARE), and that voting is the only way to influence political affairs (VOTING).

B. A "Fiscal Optimism" cluster includes questions about the respondent's belief that his own financial picture had improved over that of a year before (YEARAGO) and would be better in another year (YEARAHEAD); parallel questions were asked concerning general business conditions in the nation (BUSNAGO, BUSNAHEAD), as well as a general evaluation of current business conditions (BUSNCOND).

C. A personal "Life Control" cluster represents a social-psychological measure in which the respondent is asked if he is usually able to plan ahead (PLANAHEAD), if his plans are usually realized (REALIZED), if his life seems to go as planned (LIFEPLAN), and if he feels he can in fact run his own life (RUNLIFE).

D. A "Political Protest" cluster measures attitudes toward three elements of political expression which have recently become salient aspects of American politics: attitude toward protest politics in general (PROTEST), attitudes toward the legitimacy of purposely defying or disobeying a law as an act of civil disobedience (DISOBEYLAW), and attitudes toward non-violent sit-ins and other demonstrations (SITINS).

TABLE 1: Chronological Age and Subjective Age Identification

	Young Identification	No Age Identification	Old Identification	(N)
18-24	59.6	34.3	6.0	(332)
25-35	33.5	55.0	11.5	(487)
36-45	23.2	60.5	16.2	(365)
46-55	17.8	61.8	20.4	(353)
56-65	8.8	57.3	33.9	(307)
66-75	9.4	44.1	46.5	(202)
76+	4.6	35.8	59.6	(109)

Chi-square = 498.5; df = 12; $p < .001$; gamma = .51

Each of the three hypotheses outlined previously suggests a somewhat different mode of analysis. The first hypothesis will be evaluated by examining the percentage of the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young who endorses each of the sixteen attitude items. The second hypothesis, which predicts that the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young will exhibit different patterns of attitude organization, will be evaluated through a comparison of the inter-item zero-order correlations within each of the four clusters. The third hypothesis concerns the argument that subjective age identification is but a reflection of socioeconomic or social position variables. The first test of this hypothesis will examine the bivariate correlations between the social position variables and the separate attitude items; comparison of these correlations across the subjectively young and non-subjectively young will indicate if these "control" variables have differential impact on the sub-groups.

The second test of this hypothesis will include a re-examination of the inter-item correlations within each of the attitude clusters, but computed this time as first-order partial correlations in which the controls are instituted for Level of Education and Father's Occupation. If subjective age identification is simply a reflection of these other variables, then the inter-item correlations for the subjectively young should be substantially reduced, or at least reduced to a much greater degree than is found for the non-subjectively young.

Finally, a word should be said about the use or non-use of tests of statistical significance. There are a number of factors which argue that such tests are inappropriate in this analysis. For example, our goal is the comparison of the two sub-groups and not the estimation of population parameters. A more important factor concerns the sensitivity of tests of

statistical significance to the number of cases underlying any given correlation coefficient: a relatively low correlation may be "significant" mainly because of the large number of cases which it represents. And since the analytic sub-groups in this analysis are of somewhat different sizes, it is possible that two correlations of similar magnitude may have different levels of statistical significance or nonsignificance. For the testing of the hypotheses, substantive significance is given to a greater extent by the patterning of the correlations as they are contrasted between the groups than by the absolute magnitude of the coefficients. Nonetheless, we recognize that levels of statistical significance do communicate information about the correlations which may be of some use in evaluating them. Therefore, tables reporting correlations will underscore all coefficients which are significant at the .05 probability level, based upon one-tailed tests of significance.

III. RESULTS

Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis to be evaluated suggests that the two sub-groups of the chronological young -- those who have expressed a subjectively young identification and those who did not express any age identification at all -- will be characterized by different attitudinal modalities. In particular, it has been hypothesized that the subjectively young will be more optimistic, less alienated, and more supportive of political involvement than the non-subjectively young.

The data provide little overall support for this general proposition (Table 2), although some of the individual items do exhibit patterns in the hypothesized direction. In the case of "Political Alienation," for example, the hypothesized pattern is found for the 25-35 age group in which the

subjectively young are less alienated, while for the 18-24 age group the subjectively young are a bit more alienated than their cohort-mates.

-- Table 2 about here --

A similar difference in the impact of subjective age on the two sets of young adults is seen in the case of "fiscal optimism." Among the 25-35 age group the subjectively young are often more optimistic on fiscal matters, especially when asked to compare conditions "now" versus conditions anticipated "next year"; yet even in this age group, the subjectively young are sometimes the less optimistic. Among the younger 18-24 year-old respondents the hypothesis finds no support; indeed, for two of the items in this set there are no differences between the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young, and for the remaining three of the items the subjectively young are less optimistic about their own economic future and that of the nation's business community in general.

The "life control" set weakly supports the hypothesis. While in most instances the subjectively young are more optimistic about their ability to plan and control their lives, the percentage differences between the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young are small and non-significant, and in one or two instances the pattern is reversed.

The three items of the "political protest" scale provide some support for the hypothesis. Among both cohorts the subjectively young are more in favor of political protest activity than are the non-subjectively young. Yet, again, the pattern does not provide overwhelming support for the hypothesized differences since many of the percentage differences are not statistically significant.

In sum, we can say on the basis of the data in Table 2 that there is suggestive but by no means conclusive evidence that subjective age

TABLE 2: Chronological Age, Subjective Age, and Socio-Political Orientations

Variable	18-24 Years Old		25-35 Years Old	
	Subjectively Young	Non-Subjectively Young	Subjectively Young	Non-Subjectively Young
A. "Political Alienation" (% alienated)				
1. NOSAY	39.1	34.2	30.9	42.5
2. COMPLEX	70.2	67.5	69.1	76.4
3. NOCARE	40.7	40.9	43.2	46.0
4. VOTING	48.0	51.8	49.7	60.2
B. "Fiscal Optimism" (% optimistic)				
1. YEARAGO	57.4	58.0	45.3	50.0
2. YEARAHEAD	48.8	64.4	58.6	59.4
3. BUSNCOND	60.0	67.5	60.0	56.3
4. BUSNAGO	52.9	59.2	52.1	55.1
5. BUSNAHEAD	28.4	27.7	40.8	21.7
C. "Life Control" (% yes)				
1. PLANAHEAD	68.4	66.4	73.6	70.2
2. REALIZED	46.6	44.2	53.2	52.3
3. LIFEPLAN	35.5	36.0	38.9	35.6
4. RUNLIFE	78.4	76.6	81.9	86.0
D. "Political Protest" (% agree)				
1. PROTEST	35.9	28.1	35.8	23.2
2. DISOBEYLAW	25.3	26.5	22.7	16.3
3. SITINS	15.7	8.8	11.7	8.0

identification is related to the direction of attitudes and endorsements made by members of the same chronological age group at a particular point in time. However, the data indicate that the impact of subjective age identification may be different for different stages in the life cycle, at least in some of the attitude domains. Thus, in the case of political alienation, the data indicate that the subjectively young among the 25-35 age group are the less alienated, while the subjectively young among the 18-24 age group are the more alienated within their cohort. To some extent, this latter finding parallels similar work in which subjective age identification was examined in a comparison of persons 18-35 years old with persons over 60 years old (Cutler, 1974). In this study it was found that on such issues as the legalization of abortion, women's rights, and the use of federal authority to combat industrial pollution, the subjectively young among the chronologically young were more "liberal" while at the same time the subjectively old among the old were less "liberal". In short, the meaning and implications of subjective age identification at different points in the life cycle will vary. This point is of substantial importance to future analyses in this area.

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis concerns the structure of the attitudes held by the sub-groups within each of the chronological age groups. While evaluation of the first hypothesis indicated few substantial differences between the subjectively young and non-subjectively young in terms of the percentage differences in the direction of the attitudes held, this second component of the analysis concerns the possibility that sub-groups defined in terms of subjective age will differ in the way that their attitudes are organized. In particular, and in part following from the Mannheimian notion of the

historically self-conscious "generation unit" which may develop within the larger birth cohort, the second hypothesis predicts that the subjectively young will have a more integrated attitude structure than the non-subjectively young. This is assessed by examining the inter-item correlations within each of the four attitudinal areas analyzed above.

Table 3 presents several patterns of inter-correlations within the four sets of attitude items. Of course, it should be noted initially that the four sets are not presented here as true "scales" in the technical sense of the term; rather, our interest in these so-called "inter-item correlations" is simply as a means for drawing comparisons between the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young sub-groups, and between the two age cohorts of "young" -- 18-24 and 25-35.

-- Table 3 about here --

Table 3 demonstrates quite clearly that the subjectively young do not, as hypothesized, generally exhibit a more structured patterning of their attitudes in the four areas examined here. Within each of the clusters or "scales," there are some correlations which are greater for the subjectively young, some which are smaller for the subjectively young, and some for which the two sub-groups do not have substantial differences.

Nonetheless, within this general pattern, which runs contrary to the hypothesis, certain exceptions should be noted. In the case of political alienation, for example, there are some instances in which the subjectively young within the 18-24 age group have substantially higher inter-item correlations than the non-subjectively young. This is not found within the 25-35 age group; in fact, in the 25-35 age group the subjectively young have noticeably lower, rather than higher, levels of inter-correlation.

TABLE 3: Inter-Item Correlations for Subjectively Young and Non-Subjectively Young

Inter-Item Pair	18-24 Years Old		25-35 Years Old	
	Subjectively Young	Non-Subjectively Young	Subjectively Young	Non-Subjectively Young
A. "Political Alienation"				
1. NOSAY-VOTING	36*	14	38*	37*
2. NOSAY-COMPLEX	13*	11	21*	32*
3. NOSAY-NOCARE	37*	39*	36*	50*
4. VOTING-COMPLEX	14*	27*	31*	32*
5. VOTING-NOCARE	26*	05	22*	28*
6. COMPLEX-NOCARE	12*	11	14*	24*
B. "Fiscal Optimism"				
1. YEARAGO-YEARAHEAD	31*	-12	09	23*
2. YEARAGO-BUSNCOND	-03	07	28*	27*
3. YEARAGO-BUSNAGO	-07	-09	22*	22*
4. YEARAGO-BUSNAHEAD	02	-25	07	06
5. YEARAHEAD-BUSNCOND	16	36*	16	20*
6. YEARAHEAD-BUSNAGO	01	26*	06	08
7. YEARAHEAD-BUSNAHEAD	35*	18	23*	23*
8. BUSNCOND-BUSNAGO	10	24	40*	34*
9. BUSNCOND-BUSNAHEAD	45*	42*	47*	35*
10. BUSNAGO-BUSNAHEAD	07	34*	38*	29*
C. "Life Control"				
1. PLANAHEAD-REALIZED	36*	41*	34*	39*
2. PLANAHEAD-LIFEPLAN	19*	19*	12	18*
3. PLANAHEAD-RUNLIFE	16*	19*	21*	18*
4. REALIZED-LIFEPLAN	21*	26*	35*	39*
5. REALIZED-RUNLIFE	22*	28*	34*	20*
6. LIFEPLAN-RUNLIFE	29*	25*	28*	20*
D. "Political Protest"				
1. PROTEST-DISOBEYLAW	32*	17*	33*	36*
2. PROTEST-SITINS	36*	39*	36*	31*
3. DISOBEYLAW-SITINS	38	26*	30*	38*
Range of N for each Subgroup				
Set B:	73-81	38-47	58-71	84-105
Sets A, C, D:	189-196	107-112	156-160	251-265

* = $p < .05$, one-tailed test of significance

Another subpattern is found in the set of political protest items. Among the 18-24 age group two of the three inter-item correlations are greater for the subjectively young, as suggested by the hypothesis. This finding is different than that observed for the 25-35 age group, in which subjective age identification does not yield clear variations in patterns of inter-item correlation. Finally, it may be noted that within the fiscal optimism scale, subjective age does seem to make a much bigger difference for the 18-24 age group than for the 25-35 age group. Contrary to the direction of the differences posited in the hypothesis, however, the non-subjectively young among the 18-24 age group had higher levels of inter-item correlation at least as often as did the subjectively young.

Although the data do not support the directional component of the original hypothesis, they do demonstrate -- as in the cases of fiscal optimism, political protest, and alienation -- that subjective age identification has differential impact at different stages in the life cycle -- at least for the age groups or cohorts examined in this 1972 data set.

Hypothesis Three

The third hypothesis concerns social location or social stratification in the sense that attitudinal patterns and differences associated with subjective age identification are simply a reflection of the socioeconomic characteristics of those individuals who happen to express an age identification. As described earlier, prior investigation of age consciousness among the young has suggested that it is only or at least mainly the affluent or children of the affluent and privileged socioeconomic strata that have the time and other resources to evolve an historically-based age consciousness. In a parallel way, but with the opposite conclusion, some gerontologists have suggested that it is mainly among the poor and disadvantaged older persons

that age consciousness develops, as these old poor come to see age as either the cause or the potential solution of their problems.

The two tests of this hypothesis included in the present paper will be to examine the influence which socioeconomic factors have upon (a) the sixteen items comprising the four clusters of orientations, and (b) the twenty-five inter-item correlations presented in Table 3. The first test examines whether the individual attitude items substantially covary with socioeconomic status. Of course, we should expect on the basis of previous studies of such phenomena as alienation (e.g., Schwartz, 1973; Bengtson and Cutler, 1974) and political participation (e.g., Milbrath, 1965; Verba and Nie, 1972) that socioeconomic factors will be to some extent correlated with the dependent variables analyzed here. Our specific interest is not so much in the general correlation of attitudes with socioeconomic factors, but in the degree to which the correlation is substantially greater for those who have a subjective age identification. That is, since some prior research has suggested that subjective age identification is simply an outgrowth of the social location of those individuals who happen to manifest the age identification, our test of the third hypothesis is meant to establish whether or not the phenomena associated with subjective age are simply a function of the socioeconomic background characteristics.

In the first test, the direct bivariate correlation of the attitudes with socioeconomic factors will reveal whether these factors behave differently for the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young. The second test will represent a re-examination of the inter-item correlations presented in Table 3 -- this time as first-order partial correlations, with the socioeconomic factor as the control variable. While we expect the partial correlation to be smaller than the zero-order correlation of the same pair of

variables, the question is one of differences between the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young within each chronological age group. If the reduction in correlation in the former is substantially greater than in the latter, then it may be concluded that subjective age is but a surrogate for social status factors. The alternative, of course, is that the variance associated with subjective age factors does represent an independent dimension of explanation.

The initial choice for a variable to measure social location is that of level of the respondent's formal education -- a variable which has been seen in substantial numbers of previous studies to be associated with social and political attitudes. However, it should be recognized that for the younger respondents in the 18-24 age group, the respondent's education has in many cases not yet been completed. Hence, we decided to employ each respondent's father's occupation, coded in terms of the major census categories, in order to see if a different measure of social status is required to test the hypothesis for younger adults.

A complete set of correlations to test the first hypothesis would include 128 correlations. Since our main interest is in whether or not there are substantial differences in the magnitudes of the correlations between the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young, however, it is appropriate to summarize these latter differences, rather than to present all of the correlations. The number of statistically significant correlations is tabulated in Table 4. A correlation between a socioeconomic factor and an attitude variable has been considered significant if the significance level was .05 or beyond, using a one-way test of significance.

-- Table 4 about here --

TABLE 4: Significant Correlations Between Attitude Items and Socioeconomic Indicators

	18-24 Years Old				25-35 Years Old			
	Subjectively Young		Non-Subjectively Young		Subjectively Young		Non-Subjectively Young	
Cluster	Educ	FO	Educ	FO	Educ	FO	Educ	FO
A. "Political Alienation"								
(4 items)	2	0	4	0	4	4	4	3
B. "Fiscal Optimism"								
(5 items)	0	0	1	1	2	1	1	1
C. "Life Control"								
(4 items)	4	1	3	4	4	4	4	4
D. "Political Protest"								
(3 items)	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	0

Educ = level of Respondent Education; FO = Father's Occupation (census categories)
"Significance" = $p < .05$, one-tailed test

The data in Table 4 suggest a number of conclusions. First, for the respondents in the 18-24 age group, Father's Occupation does not yield a greater number of significant correlations than does the respondent's Education. Indeed for this age group there is only one instance -- the life control scale for the non-subjectively young -- in which the number of statistically significant correlates is greater for Father's Occupation. That the respondent's Education should be a sufficient measure of social location even for this younger group is not surprising: by age 24 most members of a birth cohort have had their "normal" opportunity for high school and college experience.

Second, the respondent's Education is significantly related to the attitudinal orientations under study here, except for the fiscal optimism scale. This suggests that the organization of attitudes within the separate clusters should be, as suggested above, re-examined in order to see if that organization is substantially affected by the respondent's educational level. Third, and more basic to the test of the hypothesis, Table 4 fails to demonstrate that the respondent's Education or Father's Occupation correlates more substantially with attitudes among the subjectively young than among the non-subjectively young, as predicted by the third hypothesis.

-- Table 5 about here --

The structure of Table 5, which provides the second test of the third hypothesis, presents a number of pieces of information. Within each of the two chronological age groups the inter-item correlations are listed separately for the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young. Furthermore, within each of these groups, two columns of inter-item correlations are presented, labeled as "Z" and "P". The "Z" columns are the zero-order correlations

TABLE 5: Zero-Order and First-Order Partial Correlations for Subjectively Young and Non-Subjectively Young

	18-24				25-35			
	Subj Young		Non-Subj Young		Subj Young		Non-Subj Young	
Inter-Item Pair	Z	P	Z	P	Z	P	Z	P
A. "Political Alienation								
1. NOSAY-VOTING	36*	34*	14	09	38*	30*	37*	32*
2. NOSAY-COMPLEX	13*	12*	11	07	21*	13	32*	27*
3. NOSAY-NOCARE	37*	37*	39*	36*	36*	33*	50*	46*
4. VOTING-COMPLEX	14*	11	27*	20*	31*	21*	32*	25*
5. VOTING-NOCARE	26*	25*	05	-05	22*	18*	28*	20*
6. COMPLEX-NOCARE	12*	11	11	04	14*	10*	24*	19*
B. "Fiscal Optimism"								
1. YEARAGO-YEARAHEAD	31*	30*	-12	-11	09	01	23*	23*
2. YEARAGO-BUSNCOND	-03	-04	07	08	28*	26*	27*	27*
3. YEARAGO-BUSNAGO	-07	-09	-09	-09	22*	20*	22*	22*
4. YEARAGO-BUSNAHEAD	02	02	-25	-23*	07	01	06	06
5. YEARAHEAD-BUSNCOND	16	15	36*	34*	16	14	20*	19*
6. YEARAHEAD-BUSNAGO	01	-01	26*	26*	06	02	08	08
7. YEARAHEAD-BUSNAHEAD	35*	35*	18	23	23*	19	23*	23*
8. BUSNCOND-BUSNAGO	10	09	24	23	40*	39*	34*	36*
9. BUSNCOND-BUSNAHEAD	45*	45*	42*	48*	47*	45*	35*	36*
10. BUSNAGO-BUSNAHEAD	07	07	34*	36*	38*	37*	29*	29*
C. "Life Control"								
1. PLANAHEAD-REALIZED	36*	33*	41*	43*	34*	30*	39*	37*
2. PLANAHEAD-LIFEPLAN	19*	15*	19*	14*	12	08	18*	15*
3. PLANAHEAD-RUNLIFE	16*	11*	19*	15	21*	16*	18*	14*
4. REALIZED-LIFEPLAN	21*	18*	26*	27*	35*	33*	39*	37*
5. REALIZED-RUNLIFE	22*	18*	28*	29*	34*	32*	20*	16*
6. LIFEPLAN-RUNLIFE	29*	26*	25*	21*	28*	26*	20*	18*
D. "Political Protest"								
1. PROTEST-DISOBEYLAW	32*	32*	17*	14*	33*	32*	36*	34*
2. PROTEST-SITINS	36*	35*	39*	36*	36*	34*	31*	30*
3. DISOBEYLAW-SITINS	38	37*	26*	24*	30*	29*	38*	37

Z = zero-order correlations
P = first-order partials
* = P < .05, one-tailed test

and have been simply copied from Table 3. The columns labeled "P" are the first-order partial correlations in which each of the zero-order correlations has been partialled on the basis of the respondent's level of formal education. Statistically significant correlations (at the .05 level or beyond using a one-tailed test) are marked with an asterisk.

It is interesting to note that within the data presented in Table 5 there is virtually no support for the third hypothesis. That is, it cannot be argued from these data that the patterning of attitudes among the subjectively young is simply a function of socioeconomic status -- represented here as level of formal education. The hypothesis directs our attention to the decrease in correlation between the zero and the partial for any given pair of items. Of course, there is in most instances a smaller partial than whole correlation; such is not only the nature of partial correlations, it is also anticipated by the number of significant correlations between the attitude variables and Education reported in Table 4.

The important point of comparison, however, concerns the comparative decrease in correlation between the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young. In the vast majority of comparisons, any drop seen between the zero-order and the partial correlation within the subjectively young is also seen for the non-subjectively young. The correlations for the "fiscal optimism" set in the 18-24 age group clearly demonstrate this point. While the overall magnitude of some of the correlational differences between the subjectively young and non-subjectively young is large, the magnitude of the decreases between whole and partial correlations are virtually identical. Where there are exceptions to this general pattern in Table 5, they are typically connected either with (a) correlations which are so close to zero as to make the differences meaningless, or (b) statistically significant correlations in

which the partial remains significant and of the same general magnitude as the zero-order correlation even though the partialing factor has taken some of the variation out of the original inter-item correlation. In short, it may be concluded from Table 4 and Table 5 that whatever patterns of relationships among attitudes may be found to characterize the subjectively young, or to characterize differences between the subjectively young and non-subjectively young, such attitude patterns are not simply reflections of differential socioeconomic characteristics of the component age groups.

CONCLUSIONS

Three kinds of concluding remarks are suggested by the foregoing analysis -- findings from the analysis of subjective age among the chronologically young, suggestions concerning the measurement of subjective age, and issues of interpretation.

First, subjective age does make a difference. Within chronologically-defined age groups, the subjectively young and those who do not express a subjective age identification are, in identifiable ways, dissimilar in terms of the attitudes they hold and the organization of those attitudes. At the same time, however, the extent of subjective age identification is not, perhaps, as widespread as might have been expected on the basis of past studies of youth and sociopolitical orientations or on the basis of the Mannheimian notions of generational-historical consciousness and the concept of "fresh contact" between new cohorts of young persons and their socio-cultural milieu.

Second, subjective age, while clearly not invariantly correlated with chronological age, is substantially associated with it. More specifically, however, the percentage distributions in Table 1 demonstrate that subjective

age has a curvilinear relationship with chronological age. That is, a greater proportion of those respondents in the middle age categories -- from 36 to 65 years of age -- do not subjectively identify with either young or old than do the respondents in the younger and older age categories. Future research must consider how the dynamics of life cycle development interact with societal norms in the apparent evolution of subjective age identification from identification with young, to no age identification, to a subjectively old age identification.

Third, while subjective age is neither homogeneously distributed across the life cycle nor universally correlated with patterns of attitudes, three important generalizations do emerge from this study. (A) For some attitudes subjective age does distinguish among those within a chronologically-defined age cohort. For example, within the 25-35 age group the subjectively young are less alienated than the non-subjectively young. And within the 18-24 age group, the subjectively young have a somewhat more structured profile of correlations in the area of political alienation than do the non-subjectively young.

(B) Another generalization concerns the differential importance of subjective age identification for different age groups. Thus, for the fiscal optimism scale the subjectively young are, as hypothesized, more optimistic than the non-subjectively young; subjective age identification makes no difference, however, for the 18-24 age group. For the political protest scale the subjectively young among the 18-24 age group exhibit a stronger degree of inter-item structure than the non-subjectively young, but subjective age makes no difference for the 25-35 age group. While the subjectively young in the 18-24 age group are somewhat less politically alienated, the subjectively young in the 25-35 age group are somewhat more alienated. Furthermore,

these findings parallel the results of a previous analysis in which the impact of subjective age was measured among the chronologically young and the chronologically old (Cutler, 1974). In that analysis it was found, for example, that on several contemporary socio-political issues the subjectively young were more liberal while the subjectively old were less liberal. In short, just as the incidence of subjective age is differentially distributed across chronological age groups, the importance and the direction of impact of subjective age is different within different chronological age groups.

(C) The third generalization to emerge from the present study concerns the hypothesis that subjective age is merely an outgrowth or reflection of socioeconomic differences. This hypothesis finds no support in the analyses presented here. Correlations between the attitude items and the respondent's educational level, while in some cases substantial and statistically significant, are virtually identical for the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young. Similarly the influence of educational level upon the inter-item correlations, as measured by partial correlations, is the same for the two sub-groups of the chronologically young. Furthermore, this pattern of no difference between the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young was found for both the 18-24 and the 25-35 age groups -- a conclusion which is mirrored by a parallel analysis of subjective old age identification within the chronologically old (Cutler, 1975). Consequently, whatever differences are found between the subjectively young and the non-subjectively young cannot be attributed to differential social location of the respondents in the two groups.

Fourth, future research in this area will have to consider more expansive conceptual and operational definitions of subjective age. Several dimensions of subjective age definition are not included in the present research. For

example, although the subjectively young in the present analysis are those who feel close to young people while at the same time do not feel close to old, our measure does not indicate how central this identification with young is to the respondent. Clearly the simple presence or absence of a subjective age identification, young or old, fails to reflect the importance of age in the cognitive and affective structure of the individual. A similar dimension concerns the place of age identification in a hierarchy of identifications. Thus, for example, young respondents may indeed strongly identify themselves as young, but possess attitudinal and behavioral orientations more closely associated with their religious or ethnic group membership. Yet another dimension would concern the positive or negative valence which the individual attaches to the subjective age identification. A youth identification may be positively valued by younger persons while an age identification may be negatively valued by those older persons who come to have a subjective old age identification. Finally, future inquiries into subjective age should consider a more detailed classification than simply old and young. The higher frequency of "no age identification" found among respondents in the 36-65 age categories (Table 1) may be symptomatic of the need for additional categories. In an analogous situation studies of subjective social class identification experienced a "breakthrough" when the category of "working class" was added to "middle class" and "lower class" in attitudinal investigations. Similarly, as students of life cycle development are recognizing (or identifying) such life stages as "middle age" or "young old" (e.g., Neugarten, 1974), so should students of subjective age identification consider these additional kinds of categorizations as the possible bases of developing self-images.

Fifth, the interpretation of the age patterns presented in this analysis must be cautioned with the observation that the data represent a cross-sectional look at both chronological age and subjective age. Thus, differences between the 18-24 age group and the 25-35 age group cannot legitimately be interpreted in maturational or developmental terms. Those respondents aged 18-24 in this analysis represent a particular generational birth cohort measured in 1972, and the patterning of their age identification and attitudes cannot be interpreted solely in terms of "youth". Whether or not subjective age identification develops as a cohort-based phenomenon or, conversely, is a component of self-image which evolves as a correlate of the aging process cannot be discerned or predicted from this analysis. What this analysis and the other papers which are part of the research project do suggest, however, is that subjective age does behave differently within different age groups; thus, future research in this area must confront the maturational explanation with the cohort or generational explanation.

Finally, since the data base employed in this analysis is cross-sectional in nature, we must consider the possibility that a period effect explains the various patterns of subjective age and the association of subjective age with socio-political attitudes. Students of political socialization and youthful protest behavior might have expected a greater amount of subjective age identification among young adults than was found in this analysis. Yet the social and political context of the 1972 "period" may indeed represent a quite different milieu than that observed in the second half of the 1960s, when student protest occupied the attention of scholars and journalists alike. Thus, parallel to the potential longer-term effects of life-cycle developmental processes and generational birth cohort factors, the short-term effects of cultural, social, and political events upon subjective age identification must be considered as a plausible explanatory hypothesis.

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